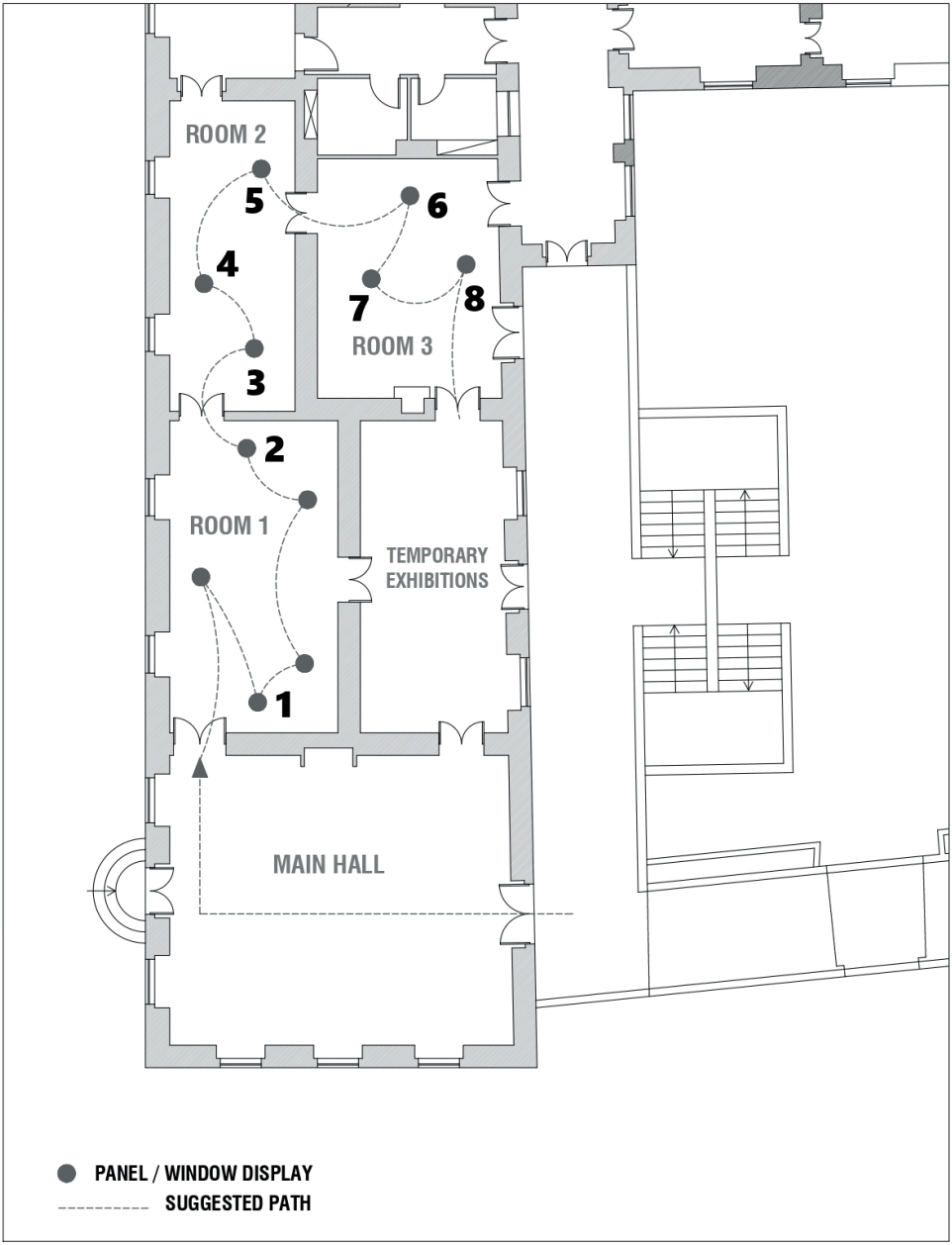
Marciano Azuaga

private **COLLECTION**
to public **MUSEUM**

EXHIBITION GUIDE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MARCIANO AZUAGA: PRIVATE COLLECTION TO PUBLIC MUSEUM

Marciano Azuaga was born in Valença, in 1838, and joined the Royal Company of the Portuguese Railways at the age of 25, in 1863, as a clerk at the Devesas railway station. He remained there for more than three decades, reaching the rank of station master 1st class, which he held until the end of his career in 1899. A prominent figure in the local context due to his professional circumstance, from the 1880s onwards the relevance of his private collection allowed him to meet some of the main figures of the national intelligentsia.

Committed to enlightened associativism and local mutualism, he was initiated into Freemasonry, joined several scientific societies and was Vice-President of the VilanovenseHumanitarian Association of Relief. His dedication to the initiatives he was part of was distinguished with the degree of knight of the Order of Christ and with the Spanish commendation of Isabel, the Catholic.

Assembled throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, the collection had been available to the public, for free, since at least 1880, on a floor of an apartment building, paid for by the collector. It was, thus, the city's first museum. Recognizing the instructive and social value of museums, Marciano Azuaga donated his collection to the city on February 24, 1904, on the sole condition that it remain open to the enjoyment and instruction of the public. Reorganized by António Augusto Rocha Peixoto, with the collector's support, the Azuaga Municipal Museum opened that same year, in Rua da Fervença, Devesas, where it remained until its dismantling in 1933.

Driven by the collector's personal taste and interests, the collection refers to several scientific areas, as an attempt to showcase a universalizing view on the knowledge of its time. It coincided, therefore, with the pedagogical intention that the end of the century imprinted on museums, consolidating them as privileged spaces for study and learning.

1 – CREATING A COLLECTION

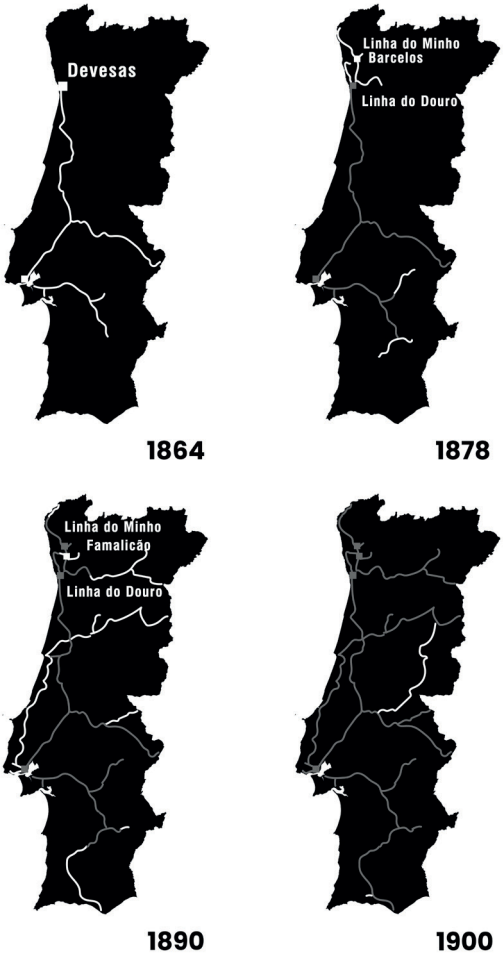
The collector's position at the Devesas railway station gave him a privileged place in one of the main national circulation arteries. This connection also benefited from his family ties: his brother Joaquim, also a collector, was station master in Barcelos and Vila Nova de Famalicão; brothers-in-law Eduardo and Adriano Pereira de Meireles were, respectively, tax inspector of the Minho and Douro lines and head of the Gaia elevators, equipment that connected the Devesas station to the riverside area, which at the time was an international commercial port. His marriage to Bernardina Pereira de Meireles, owner of a grocery store near the station and sister-in-law of the sculptor José Joaquim Teixeira Lopes, also contributed to bringing the collector closer to the local artistic elites.

Devoid of academic pretensions and motivated by the progressive spirit of scientific societies of the time, Marciano Azuaga was particularly permeable to the cultural conceptions that led to the action of the Porto Instruction Society, which had taken Joaquim de Vasconcelos as its ideological mentor. He had even visited Marciano Azuaga's private museum years before the collector joined this Society, at the proposal of naturalist Eduardo Sequeira, in 1882.

Settled in the main intellectual circles of his time, his collection would attract the visit of other academics such as José Fortes, Ricardo Severo, Rocha Peixoto or José Leite de Vasconcelos who, in 1893, together with Luciano Cordeiro, proposed Marciano Azuaga as member of the Lisbon Geographical Society. These visits and contacts, but also the collector's entrepreneurship, resulted in donations to his Museum, even after its donation 1904.

Within the collection, the fascination for ancient or exotic civilizations and the appeal of archaeology is joined by sensitivity towards traditional and industrial practices, Fine Arts of the past and present, but also by a curiosity for bibliographic rarities or the natural sciences. The almost 3000 donated objects manifest

Marciano Azuaga's personal development, but also that of the institutions and circles of intimacy he frequented, in a social fabric that not infrequently intersected in a single individual the interest in various areas of knowledge.



Silveira, L. E., Alves, D., Lima, N. M., Alcântara, A. & Puig-Farré, J. (2011) Caminhos de ferro, população e desigualdades territoriais em Portugal, 1801-1930. *Ler História*, n.º 61 [Novas Perspetivas na História dos Transportes], pp. 7-37.

2 – THE COLLECTION ON DISPLAY

The exhibitions held in the nineteenth century were of particular importance for the dissemination of knowledge, technological and artistic vanguards or even traditional practices. Promoted through public, private or associative initiative, the first exhibitions initially appeared in England and France, taking on international dimension with the International Exhibition of 1851, at the Crystal Palace in London, followed by those in Paris (1855) and Porto (1865).

The Porto International Exhibition of 1865, which had been held to inaugurate the Porto Crystal Palace, consecrated this practice in Portugal, adding the international scope that exponentiated its impact in the country, opening it to foreign developments. At the same time, the North of the country thus found in Porto's Crystal Palace a space dedicated to learning, disseminating and valuing contemporary industries and practices, but also art and science.

Marciano Azuaga was an active participant and promoter of several exhibitions. In 1881 he participated, for the first time, with objects from his collection in an exhibition, a practice in which he would stand out, participating as an exhibitor, gatherer of pieces, organizer or jury in several exhibitions held in Porto and Vila Nova de Gaia.

1881

Exhibition-Bazaar of Fine Arts
Porto Artistic Centre

Natural History Exhibition
Porto Instruction Society

1882

National Ceramics Exhibition
Porto Instruction Society

1883

Modern Goldsmith and Jewellery Exhibition
Porto Instruction Society

1889

Exhibition of Hunting and Fishing Utensils
Porto Hunters Club

1894

Insular and Colonial Portuguese Exhibition
Porto Crystal Palace Society

Agricultural and Industrial Exhibition of Vila Nova de Gaia
Exhibition Organizing Committee

3 – VALUING THE PAST

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Europe experienced a cultural revolution with the replacement of the creationist paradigm by the evolutionist one. Until then, it was believed that the Universe, the Earth and Man were divine works. With the advance of evolutionism, these realities began to be understood as the result of long natural processes, inaugurating a new vision of the world, in which science replaced faith and tradition as the main source of explanation.

This revolution was accompanied by profound political transformations, marked by the formation of new national states. These new entities sought to legitimize their existence through a historical foundation, which could not be found in recent times or in the Roman past, whose imperial and supranational dimension was not aligned with the idea of nation.

In the field of archaeology and anthropology, this new paradigm allowed for important advances, such as the appreciation of prehistoric artifacts and the recognition of the long antiquity of human presence. Observation, analysis, and empirical proof became the foundations of scientific knowledge. It is in this context that Archaeology was born as a scientific discipline, gradually replacing amateur collecting.

In Portugal, the development of prehistoric archaeology was closely linked to the work of the Geological Commission of Portugal (1835-1868). Carlos Ribeiro, a central figure in this programme, led pioneering studies on the antiquity of man, aligning himself with European evolutionary thinking.

In the same period, romanticism influenced the construction of national narratives. Alexandre Herculano saw the origins of Portugal in the foundation of the Portucalense county and in the Christian Reconquista, while Martins Sarmento pointed to the Lusitanians, located in the far west of the peninsula according to classical

authors, as the true ancestors of the Portuguese.

It was in this technical, practical and scientific debate environment that the study of the past gained increasing relevance, motivating the creation of the discipline of Anthropology, Human Palaeontology and Prehistoric Archaeology at the University of Coimbra in 1885, under the regency of Bernardino Machado, and the foundation of the Portuguese Ethnological Museum in 1893, by J. Leite de Vasconcelos.

4 – CULT OF MONUMENTS

Throughout the nineteenth century, Heritage's valorization is part of the desire to recover symbols of the past, as references for a national identity still under construction. As such, it were medieval monuments that were most valued.

The values of memory that guided the appreciation for such monuments were complemented by their conception as an artistic object, highlighting the development of Art History in the country. The Monastery of Nossa Senhora da Vitória (Batalha) stood out among other monuments, combining its artistic exceptionality with its historical testimony. Thus, in 1840, the first restoration campaign of a national monument began in Batalha, guided by Luís Mouzinho de Albuquerque.

Aimed at the reconstitution of its original Gothic state, this intervention would contrast with the criteria adopted by António Augusto Gonçalves, in 1893, during the restoration of the Old Cathedral of Coimbra. Between the two, the transition of criterion from unity of style to a search for the buildings' authenticity, based on their historical and archaeological knowledge, is revealed.

5 – INDUSTRIAL ARTS

The concept of industrial arts developed from the articulation between art and technology. Catalyzed by the industrial revolution, it is also the result of the consolidation of industrial education in the country and the action of institutions committed to its development.

The School of the Porto Artistic Centre (1880) or the School of Drawing and Modelling of Devesas (1882) were two of these institutions, which complemented the contents taught in official education through curricula concerning artistic culture. The latter School, founded after the National Ceramics Exhibition of 1882, consisted of a class taught by the sculptor José Joaquim Teixeira Lopes, aimed at training local industrial workers.

The Exhibition and the School of the Porto Artistic Centre derived from the guidance of Joaquim de Vasconcelos who, in 1877, had warned of the need to reform the teaching of Fine Arts, stressing the relevance of schools and museums of industrial arts. The solutions he proposed identified in traditional industries a manifestation of the most characteristic identifying qualities of the Portuguese people. In this context, in 1883, a petition was presented, among others, by Marciano Azuaga, interceding for the foundation of an industrial school in Vila Nova de Gaia, which would happen the following year.

6 – ORIENT

Europe in the nineteenth century experienced a period of intense rediscovery of the Orient, which, however, had never ceased to be present in its imagination. In the Middle East, it was the Egyptian civilization that aroused the greatest interest in Western society.

Facilitated by the appearance of the first tourist agencies, the international circulation of Egyptian reports, images and objects

amplified their diffusion in the West. However, it is due to the French Egyptologist Auguste Mariette, founder of the Bulak Museum, the preservation of Egyptian Heritage in the country, contrary to the action of other agents who acquired or usurped artifacts for the consolidation of foreign collections. In Portugal, the presence of Egyptian civilization in collections intensified in the second half of the century, through the purchase of objects and exchanges between institutions and museums.

The Far East, in turn, had a large representation in national collections, given the long Portuguese presence in the region. Associated with luxury objects, the market for Chinese and Japanese artifacts experienced great development throughout Europe, motivating phenomena such as the taste for chinoiseries or Japonism. The fascination with the Orient triggered a syncretism between the Oriental artistic languages and the curricula of European Fine Arts, as diversified as the original references used. Manifesting themselves in architecture, painting or decorative arts, the themes and motifs incorporated reflected an idealization of the East, not always coincident with the diversity of cultures that constitute it.

7 – COLONIAL WORLD

The Colonial World of the nineteenth century was marked by tensions between European powers that manifested themselves, above all, in Africa. With progressively faster transport and communication networks, the exploration of the African interior became enticing to European commercial interests. Its economic relevance would lead to claims at the Berlin Conference (1884), in an attempt to regulate trade, slavery and the division of African territory, which, however, opened space for conflicts such as the English Ultimatum (1890).

These interests motivated expeditions that sought to reaffirm the civilizing character and prestige of the colonial powers. Its results contributed to the development of scientific knowledge, systematized by institutions such as the Lisbon Geographical Society (1875), which housed specimens and artifacts collected by purchase, gift or looting.

The press, in turn, accompanied and illustrated the accounts of explorers, transporting other continents into the daily life of European society. In the Portuguese press, Africa held the primacy of the published reports, highlighting the incursions of Silva Porto, Serpa Pinto or Hermenegildo Capelo and Roberto Ivens, but also other, admittedly scientific, such as those of José de Anchieta and Francisco Newton, given their scientific repercussion.

The South American continent, due to its biodiversity and indigenous populations, retained the attention of the scientific community, especially since the definition of Anthropology as an autonomous science from Natural History. Fertile ground for the idealization of the primacy of Nature over civilization, this interest unfolded between the scientific appeal of a largely unknown biosphere and the idealization of a pristine state of the relationship between Man and Nature.

8 - FASCINATION FOR THE EXOTIC

The extra-European world stood out as a repository of great relevance for Western imagination, evocative of ancestral values accentuated by the contrast of its customs with those of the Western world.

Authors of fiction and adventure, such as Mayne Reid, crystallized on paper the myths and prejudices that resulted from their personal experiences. Of the reports he published in the Journal des Voyages in the 1880s, one is referenced in the inventory of the Marciano

Azuaga Collection, an indicator of the literature used to contextualize some of the artifacts collected. The writer Rider Haggard also achieved great popularity with books such as King Solomon's Mines, a work translated to Portuguese by writer Eça de Queirós.

The Portuguese writer would also be captivated, above all, by the East, recovering in his work the experiences of his youth and diplomatic career. If the Far East became close to him through his contact with the circumstances of Asian workers whilst acting as consul in Cuba, the references to the Middle East were reminiscent of his trip through Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and Palestine, in the company of the 5th Count of Resende, for the inauguration of the Suez Canal, in 1869.

This renewed set of exotic references was also felt in other artistic expressions, shared in forums as diverse as conferences, museums, newspapers, exhibitions, books or concert halls, offering them landscapes, sounds and characters that would come to populate their creations and the imagination of the public.

Solar Condes de Resende

Tv. dos Condes de Resende – Canelas

4410-264 Vila Nova de Gaia

Terça-feira a domingo – 09h00-12h30 | 14h00-17h30

Tlf.: 227 625 622 | Tlm.: 960 413 442

E-mail: solarcondesresende@cm-gaia.pt